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The way things go--from the Supreme Court to baseball

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WASHINGTON — Everybody is commenting on the unusual opportunity given to President Nixon by the retirement of two Supreme Court justices. He can shape the direction of the court for a generation, they say, but that's not the half of it.

The key to the real possibilities lies in the speculation that Nixon might name Vice President Spiro T. Agnew to one of these splendid jobs. Maybe this should not be taken lightly, Agnew's legal attainments aside; and anyway, from the people who gave you G. Harrold Carswell, you wouldn't expect Learned Hand.

In the first place, Agnew meets two of Nixon's major specifications; he's conservative enough, and while Maryland is not precisely a Southern state, the vice president is one of the main ornaments of the Southern strategy. In the second place, since the hot rumor is that Nixon wants a f r e s h face with him on the ticket next year, the Supreme Court would be just the right place to dump Agnew without wounding his dignity or rousing up his right-wing fans.

Then things really get interesting. The new 25th Amendment to the Constitution provides that if "there is a vacancy in the office of the vice president, the President shall nominate a vice president who shall take office upon confirmation by a majority vote of both houses of Congress."

Don't forget, there are two spots open on the Supreme Court. Add that fact to the 25th Amendment and Nixon could revamp the whole team — give the administration a brand new image and probably sew up the election a year in advance.

Here's a possible scenario:

Agnew to the Supreme Court. Secretary of State Rogers to the Supreme Court. Secretary of the Treasury Connally to the vice president (He wouldn't formally turn Republican until after he's confirmed by the Democratic majority in both houses), thus carrying Texas and mollifying Japan. This leaves two choice cabinet openings at $40,000 a year.

Nixon would put Gov. Nelson Rockefeller in as secretary of state, thus grafting the Eastern establishment onto the administration. This would leave Treasury open, and the smart money has it that the President would bring in Wilbur D. Mills (that Southern strategy again), ridding himself of a stumbling block on the Hill while getting another conservative Democrat in the cabinet to replace Connally.

Asked to comment on these possibilities, informed sources at the White House said, "Watch what we do, not what we say."

The other big story in this beleaguered city, which has no vote and no home rule, is that suddenly it doesn't even have a baseball team. After 71 years of being first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League, Washington now has only its 100 real senators, none of whom can hit the curve ball or go from first to third on a grounder.

That is not to suggest that any of the baseball senators could either. Nevertheless, they were certified big league by the arcaine laws of baseball, and their departure is a blow to the faithful, who in the years 1969-70 compiled a better attendance record than eight other major league cities, despite the highest admission prices in any city.

The move to Texas was also symbolic of how and why things are all too often done these days. Like corporations from Lockheed to the Penn Central, the senators were miserably mismanaged, on the field and off, by an arrogant and untouchable ownership. So they were bailed out and moved to Texas in a straight money grab, after various deceits and amid a barrage of propaganda as fraudulent as one of those oil company ads that would have you believe the petroleum industry really cares about the environment.

The franchise shift was an action taken behind closed doors, by 12 unaccountable men, none of whom live in Washington or care about it, and without the faintest regard for consumers of even the shoddy product recently offered here and now to be palmed off on Texas. It was a move out of the black inner city and into the white suburbs of Dallas and Fort Worth, and since the new home of the Senators—or Cowboys, or whatever they are — will be something called Turnpike Stadium, it was also a plunge into the sad mobility culture of this rootless automobile age. Finally, the main attraction in Texas seems to have been a fat television contract, reflecting the overwhelming role the flickering tube now plays in American life.

Of course the history books won't record this small matter, but some people here did care, and never will again, and that, too, is the way things go.

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